



February 27, 2008

Dear Representative:

On behalf of Mental Health America and our 320 affiliates across the country, I am writing to express our strong support for House passage of the Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act of 2007, H.R. 1424, at the earliest possible date. House passage of this historic legislation is a critical step toward enactment this year of a strong mental health parity law.

Mental health conditions are the leading cause of disability in the U.S. for individuals ages 15-44, and a leading cause of premature death, implicated in 90% of the more than 30,000 suicides annually in this country. While scientific advances have led to the development of a range of effective treatments, millions of Americans who need mental health care are routinely denied access to those treatments, with often tragic results.

Despite a compelling body of science documenting that such practices are anachronistic and costly to employee health and to the "bottom line," employer-sponsored health plans routinely continue to set strict, arbitrary treatment limits and financial requirements on mental health coverage, while imposing no such limitations, or far less onerous limitations, on coverage for other illnesses. It is shocking, more than 40 years after the passage of civil rights laws and 15 years after passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, that federal law still permits insurance discrimination on the basis of mental illness. Our polling has consistently shown that Americans abhor such discrimination and support the enactment of a strong mental health parity law. Congress can and must pass such legislation this year.

Please support improved access to needed mental health treatment. Please support H.R. 1424.

Sincerely,

David L. Shern, Ph.D.
President and CEO